

Story #437 (Tape #6, 1972)

Narrator: Ali Yıldırım

Location: Aksaray, kaza town in
Niğde Province

Date: May 1972

An Account of Yunus Emre

Yunus Emre sang in this manner:

O God, you have become a sultan of love in this heart;

It is you who have ripened my soul.

Whoever you took as your friend

You have made that person a learned man.

But, O God, whoever you cursed,

Cursed and turned out of your gates,

His dwelling place you have destroyed.

Blessed² Adem [Adam] committed a crime

And wept after that for thirty years,

Until you accepted his penitence.

The Devil, as you know, deceived Blessed Adam and Blessed Havva (Eve),

¹ One of the most popular of Turkish poets, perhaps the most popular. Born early in the 13th century, he died in 1307. A contemporary of Mevlana Rumi (founder of the Whirling Dervishes) he was a very different kind of poet. Rumi was very learned and wrote in Persian; Emre was a peasant, a mystic, who wrote in Turkish, an uneducated man in the sense of formal education. An apprentice to Sait Emre, a mystic of Central Anatolia, Yunus Emre was about 40 before he began to write. He is called a Folk Poet, though that term in Turkey refers not to an amateur but to one who writes in his native language and who is less rhetorical and formal than Court poets. He has had a great deal of attention since the founding of the Turkish Republic, and there are available editions of his works and even recordings of his work set to music.

² We are using the word Blessed for the Turkish Hazreti; it can suggest Saintly or Holy.

making them eat the grain of wheat, and when they ate the grain of wheat, God rejected them, saying to Blessed Adam and Eve, "I am rejecting you," and threw them out of Paradise. Blessed Adam and Eve wept for thirty years, but God forgave them and admitted them back into Paradise.

Now let us hear what Yunus Emre will sing about this subject:³

O Blessed Adam and Eve wept for thirty years

But you have accepted their penitence and restored them to their happy abode.

He accepted them in Paradise.

O God, you have turned the belly of a fish

Into a dungeon for a certain man;

You have permitted the body of another of your creatures to be eaten by worms;

You ordained that the life of another be spent in total poverty, whereas you gave another all your riches,

Making him a wealthy Solomon.

Friends, hear what he [Yunus Emre] has said to God, "You ordained that one man spend all his life in poverty while you gave another all your riches."

He also said, "God spoke to the Blessed Mohammed one day as follows, 'O my beloved Prophet, I shall turn all the rocks and all the mountains into

³ There is repetition throughout this account, the narrator being concerned that the audience understand the Old Turkish used by Yunus Emre, and that the poetic passages, which are sung, also be understood. Thus, we sometimes have the same material presented in Old Turkish (in verse), in Modern Turkish (in verse), and in Modern Turkish again (in prose).

Anyone interested in this account by Ali Yıldırım should check it against the Biblical account of the characters involved, against the Koranic account of them, and against Yunus Emre's poems themselves. This is a folk account and has taken liberties with all three of these written versions.

Story #437

gold for you.'" But Mohammed would not accept this, whereas Blessed Solomon was extremely rich. And Blessed Solomon also understood the languages of all the birds and animals in the world.

Now he [Yunus Emre] will sing about the blessed Moses:

O God, you invited one of your men

To the Tur Mountain,⁴

Gave him wisdom and a staff,

Making him one of your beloved.

God invited Moses and gave him a staff. (We call it a staff, but it was really a magnificent device.) He invited him, actually told Blessed Moses, "You will go to the Tur Mountain," and thus sent him there.

Now let us come to Blessed Yusuf (Joseph). Blessed Joseph and his brothers went hunting one day. While they were hunting, his brothers threw him into a well. He slept for a while, there in the well.

Then along came a merchant and camped near the well and sent his men to the well for water. They saw that a beautiful light⁵ *Resplendent beauty* (just like electric lights) was shining from down there. The men went and reported this to the merchant, who said to them, "Go back and find out who it is down there and bring him up." They went down into the well and discovered that it was a child of seven or eight years of age. The merchant took this child with him to Egypt where he grew up and eventually became a shah. Now Yunus Emre will sing about this subject:

⁴ Is this another name for Mt. Sinai?

⁵ Characters so beautiful they glow, radiant people, are not uncommon in folktales. Sometimes it is female beauty. F574.1 Resplendent beauty.

Story #437

O God, you have caused one man
 To be thrown into a dungeon;
 But later you have caused him to be released
 And made a shah in Egypt.

While Joseph was the shah of Egypt, his brothers went to Egypt to buy wheat. He gave them the wheat they asked for. Among the brothers was Bunyamin [Benjamin], and into this Benjamin's sack of wheat Joseph had placed secretly a golden bowl. When they set out for home, Joseph sent his men after them, saying, "Those men [his brothers] have stolen my golden bowl. Go and search for them."

His men followed them [the brothers] and stopped them on the road, saying to them, "You have stolen the golden bowl of our padishah. We shall search you."

They responded, "All right, go ahead and search us."

They [Joseph's men] searched them [Joseph's brothers], and they found the golden bowl in the sack of the brother named Benjamin. Blessed Joseph said, "Since my golden bowl was found in his sack, I shall arrest him and not let him go. This is in return for what he has done."

Then all the other brothers wept and said, "Oh, Padishah, please do not arrest our brother. Our brother Blessed Joseph⁶ was lost and eaten by worms and birds. After he had gone, this Benjamin became our father's favorite, and now if you hold him here how shall we explain this to our father?" They implored him to release Benjamin.

But Joseph said, "No, I shall keep Benjamin here."

⁶ It is an anachronism to have his brothers call him Blessed Joseph here, for he has not yet taken on any religious significance.

Story #437

They wept even more and begged harder until finally they reached an agreement. Blessed Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. am now the Padishah of Egypt. You go bac to your country, get your father, and return here."

Now let us hear what Yunus Emre will sing about this subject:

O God, you at first imprisoned one of your human creatures
And then made him to be the Padishah of Egypt,
While Yakub [Jacob] lost his eyes,
Weeping day and night.

After Joseph had disappeared, his father had wept and wept until he had finally lost his sight.⁷ His brothers returned home, took their father with them, and went again to Egypt.

Now let us hear what Yunus Emre will sing about Blessed Ismael [Ishmael]:⁸

O God, you invited one of your human creatures to come,
And offer himself " . . . as a sacrifice to me,"

But you sent a ram and had him sacrificed instead.

As you know, Blessed Ishmael's father promised to sacrifice him to God. He [Abraham] had said, "O God, if you give me a son, I shall sacrifice him to you." God gave him Blessed Ishmael as a son. One day Halil Ibrahim [Abraham] told his wife to wash Ishmael. He was goin

⁷ There is no reference here to the magic curing of Jacob's blindness. In some accounts, Jacob's blindness is cured by a robe which Joseph sends with his brothers; the robe, thrown over Jacob's head, cures his blindness. Inasmuch as Turkish tales abound in magic cures for blindness, and inasmuch as many (perhaps most) of them derive from the Koranic story of Jacob, it is worth noting the absence of that motif in this account.

⁸ Ishmael here takes the place of Isaac. In Moslem mythology Ishmael has a much greater status than he has in Judeo-Christianity. Some Moslems claim him as their first great ancestor.

Story #437

cut his throat for God's sake, but right then God sent a ram by means of Cebrail [Gabriel], saying, "Take this ram to Abraham and tell him not to kill his son for me."

Gabriel took the ram to Abraham and said to him, "O Abraham, kill this ram instead of Ishmael. This is God's order." And so Abraham killed the ram and spared his son. This is how the custom of sacrifices started.

Let us hear now what he [Yunus Emre] will sing about Blessed Mohammed:

O God, you named one of your human creatures Mohammed Mustafa⁹

And made him one of your favorites,

Placing the crown of happiness on his head,

And made him very dear to all believers.

O God, Yunus Emre is very grateful to you

For permitting him to be a Moslem.

This is how Yunus Emre sang, starting with Blessed Adam and Eve and coming down to blessed Mohammed. They have all passed away.

⁹ The name Mustafa, common in Turkey, derives from the Arabic adjective mustafa, meaning blessed or most blessed. One hears the expression Mohammed Mustafa frequently in prayers and in religious services. Actually, it is not a name here but a religious honorific, comparable to blessed in English and to Hazreti in Turkish. Most Turkish users of the expression are unaware of its import.